

# **TRANSPORTATION RESEARCH, PLANNING, AND TECHNOLOGY INNOVATION DRAFT POOLED FUND PROGRAM PROCEDURES**

## **INTRODUCTION**

When significant or widespread interest is shown in solving transportation-related problems, research, planning, and technology innovation activities may be jointly funded by several federal, state, regional, and local transportation agencies, academic institutions, foundations, or private firms as a pooled fund study.

To qualify as a pooled fund study, more than one state transportation agency, federal agency, other agency such as a municipality or metropolitan planning organization, college/university or a private company must find the subject important enough to commit funds or other resources to conduct the research, planning, and technology innovation activity. If a subject has been studied previously, the new study should provide new information that will complement or advance previous investigations of the subject matter.

A federal, state, regional, or local transportation agency may initiate pooled fund studies. Private companies, foundations and colleges/universities may partner with any or all of the sponsoring agencies to conduct pooled fund projects. The Transportation Research, Planning, and Technology Innovation Pooled Fund Program is the successor of the former National Pooled Fund and Regional Pooled Fund Programs.

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## **PROJECT INITIATION PROCESS**

A calendar quarter process is used to manage the initiation of the pooled fund projects. Federal, state, regional, and local transportation agencies may propose potential projects. University Transportation Centers and other academic-based research organizations as well as private companies may also use the project proposal process but may not, at this time, serve as the sponsoring agency. Problem statements are used to post potential projects. The status of each project can be checked throughout the quarterly commitment period.

### **Project Proposed**

The first step in initiating a pool-funded project is the completion of a problem statement by the sponsoring agency. The problem statement will include a project title, project description, budget, project goal, estimated project duration, deliverables, and sponsor information for further information. The agency posting the project should also indicate whether they plan to administer the project or whether they wish to have the project administered by the Transportation Research Board (TRB).

**Posted on Website by Sponsor**CAn actively maintained website will be used by the sponsoring agency to post proposed research, planning, and technology innovation projects. Projects may be posted at any time during a calendar quarter (i.e. January-March, April-June, July-September, October-December). The posting of the proposed project will activate the AASHTO Research Advisory Committee Listserv with an alert that a new project is available for review. All posted projects will be removed at the end of each quarter, but a sponsoring agency may choose to re-post it in the next quarter to solicit additional interest.

There will also be a link from the website to the NCHRP web site for the purpose of advising people of other research underway, and/or ideas for possible research projects which could be adapted by a sponsoring state.

**Commitment by Interested Parties**CFederal, state, regional, and local transportation agencies may initiate pooled fund research projects as the sponsoring agency of these projects. However, private companies, foundations, and colleges/universities may also make in kind or financial commitments to proposed projects. The initial commitment to assist in funding a research, planning or technology innovation project is done by indicating interest via the project posting on the website. The sponsoring agency staff will determine if the project moves into the Project Viability step. If the sponsoring agency staff chooses not to move the project to the next step the process stops and all interested parties are informed of this decision by the sponsoring agency via the Listserv or email for non-AASHTO members.

### **Project Viability**

The sponsor of the proposed research project makes the determination if the project, as proposed, is viable based on the level of commitment that has been indicated by the project partners.

**Sufficient Commitment to Initiate Project**CIf the commitment from project partners is sufficient, the sponsoring agency staff will request FHWA to formally establish the project. If the level of commitment is not sufficient for the proposed project to be established, the sponsoring agency may chose to renew the project posting on the website. The sponsoring agency alternatively may decide to change the scope of the project relative to the level of commitment. The sponsoring agency is responsible for informing the project partners of any proposed changes in project scope.

### **Formal Project Commitment**

Submission of a commitment to the sponsoring agency is an acknowledgment by a project partner that it will subsequently formally obligate funding to the pooled fund project. FHWA is the broker of funds under the Transportation Research, Planning, and Technology Innovation Pooled Fund Program that are obligated to pool-funded projects. The FHWA's responsibilities include authority to approve 100 percent use of SP&R funds, assigning project numbers and an FHWA technical liaison, obtaining completed obligation forms, and notifying the project partners on all financial issues. FHWA division offices work with their States to ensure the eligibility of projects, aid in the obligation of funds, and, in some cases, serve as the FHWA technical contact for a project.

**Approval of 100 Percent Federal Funds for a Project** The normal match for SP&R funds is 80 percent federal and 20 percent non-federal funding, but the FHWA has the authority to approve 100 percent federal funding for pooled fund projects at the request of a lead State if it is in the interest of the Federal-aid highway program. As part of the formal request for project commitment by a State sponsoring agency, the agency may request approval for the funding exception. The FHWA Director for Research, Development, and Technology Service Business Unit (SBU) has the authority to approve 100 percent SP&R funding for research pooled fund projects and the Program Manager for Planning and Environment Core Business Unit (CBU) has the authority to approve 100 percent SP&R funding for planning pooled fund projects.

**FHWA Technical Liaison** An FHWA Technical Liaison in the technical area of the study is assigned to each pooled fund study at the initiation of the project. Liaisons give initial feedback on the project from the context of the national research and technology program and participate in the activities of the Technical Advisory Committee.

**Submission of Obligation Forms** Each federal, state, regional, or local agency will use the obligation forms that are generally used to obligate funds for research, planning, or technology innovation projects that use federal funding sources. The actual form that is used may differ depending on the agency. In the FHWA, an electronic process is used that incorporates the management processes that are particular to the FHWA Division and/or Headquarters procedures. This process is the official obligation of funds on behalf of the project partners. For private companies, foundations and college/universities the obligation of funds will need to be handled on a case-by-case basis. These organizations may choose to provide their funds directly to the sponsoring agency. If a check is being sent to the FHWA for this purpose, accompanying paperwork should note the formal study number (e.g., SPR-3(123)) and be mailed to Federal Highway Administration, P.O. Box 100147, Atlanta, Georgia 30384-0147. It is expected that each project partner will deploy an easily managed process to make funds accessible for the pooled fund project.

**Notification of Formal Commitment** On request from the sponsoring agency, FHWA will provide information about the status of the funds committed and obligated. Particular attention will be made to the actual obligation of funds as related to the initial commitments that were made by the project partners. In the event that the obligation of funds differs from the former commitment to the proposed project, the sponsoring agency staff may choose to re-evaluate the project's viability. If the obligation levels are sufficient, the sponsoring agency staff, along with FHWA, may move the project to the Project Initiation step.

### **Project Initiation**

The sponsoring agency staff may elect to serve in the lead agency role and complete the project initiation functions unilaterally. Another option is for the Transportation Research Board (TRB) to manage the project. If the TRB option is used, the cost of managing the process will be charged to the project. When the TRB option is not used, travel and communication expenses associated with participation on the Technical Advisory Committee are the responsibility of each project partner (i.e. transportation agency, company, foundation

or academic institution), unless stated otherwise for the individual project. All initiated projects should be recorded in Research in Progress as well as having information maintained on the pooled fund web site, by the webmaster.

**Establish Technical Advisory Committee** Each project partner is expected to appoint a technical expert to serve on the Technical Advisory Committee. The exception to this is a sponsoring agency that uses the TRB to administer the study. In that case, TRB will select a panel of experts that may not include representatives from each of the project partners; TRB will solicit nominees for panel membership from Federal agencies, States, universities, relevant associations, and numerous other organization, and, from among the nominees, select the panel members on the basis of their expertise. The Technical Advisory Committee will serve for the duration of the project. The roles of the committee include drafting and approving the project work statement, selecting the best qualified researchers to conduct the project, review of project progress reports and annual reports, acceptance of project deliverables and final reports, and completing implementation activities. Technical Advisory Committee members should expect to participate in all project-related meetings and briefings. Advanced communication technologies will be used to the greatest extent possible to reduce unnecessary travel to participate in these meetings and briefings. If vacancies occur in the Technical Advisory Committee the project partner from which the vacancy occurred will appoint a new technical expert within 90 days of the vacancy occurring.

**Work Statement Development** The lead agency (or TRB) will use a process to develop a work statement consistent with the direction of the Technical Advisory Committee. The work statement will be incorporated into a plan of work that should include the following elements: list of partners, statement of problem, work statement, project communications requirements, deliverables, researcher requirements, project performance timeline, and estimated budget.

**Investigator/Contractor Selection** The lead agency will use the plan of work to initiate the investigator selection process. The contracting laws and regulations of the lead agency will drive and govern the actual selection process. The Technical Advisory Committee member input will be considered to the greatest extent possible in the selection of the successful investigator. Any Technical Advisory Committee member concerns or grievances should be addressed within the communication structure that is adopted by the committee. If the lead agency and the Technical Advisory Committee member cannot mitigate the concerns and grievances, the option to withdraw from the project may be exercised.

Upon the successful selection of the best qualified investigator, the project is initiated through an agreement, work order, or contract that is consistent with the Conduct of Research procedures of the lead agency. (If TRB is administering the project, TRB rules regarding contracts would apply.) The lead agency will include the members of the Technical Advisory Committee in the project kick-off meeting. At this point the project monitoring and reporting process starts.

### **Project Monitoring and Reporting**

Active monitoring of all elements of the project is critical to the overall success and impact of the pool-funded effort. The lead agency is the process owner of the project monitoring

activities. The Technical Advisory Committee members need to be actively involved in reviewing and providing comments on progress reports and preliminary findings that are developed by the investigator.

**Quarterly Progress Reports** The investigator on a calendar quarter basis will provide project status and progress reports. If necessary, the lead agency or the Technical Advisory Committee may request that these reports be issued more frequently. The progress reports will include project and funding status information and any preliminary findings. The investigator should also include a review of tasks completed in the previous quarter and a plan of tasks to be completed in the upcoming quarter. The report may include, at the request of the lead agency and the Technical Advisory Committee members, an interactive information item for review of any concerns, issues or problems arising as the project develops. All progress report information, including reports on projects managed by the TRB, will be posted on the pooled fund program website and may be password protected if the project is of a confidential nature.

**Project Payments** Based on an approved invoice from the lead agency or TRB, FHWA will make a payment for the invoiced costs indicated in the report. The lead agency or TRB request reimbursement of these payments through the standard invoicing process. Reimbursement is made by FHWA from the project fund created by the project partners and is assessed in proportion to the amounts contributed by project partners. Reimbursement may not exceed the funds that have been obligated for the project.

**Annual Report** An Annual Report will be made of each project on or about the yearly anniversary date of the project's initiation. This web-based report should include the information contained in the Quarterly Progress Reports, as well as, expanded information on the project findings or conclusions and recommendations if the project has been completed. The same progress reporting procedures used for NCHRP will be used for any projects managed by the TRB. The investigator is obligated to complete the project within the timeline prepared in the plan of work, unless granted an extension by the lead agency. At the conclusion of work, the project completion step is next.

### **Project Completion**

An orderly and planned wrap up of the project is necessary to increase the implementation potential of the project findings, conclusions, or recommendations. The three key elements of successful completion are the delivery of useful and usable products, a final report with an easily understandable executive summary and final payment to the investigator.

**Deliverables Received** The lead agency, working with the Technical Advisory Committee members, needs to ensure that the plan of work includes the delivery of useful and usable products. The investigator is expected to deliver these products. Deliverables may include reports, models, recommendations, software, new/improved products, etc. Where applicable, technology innovation sessions should be scheduled for the investigator to demonstrate, explain, or provide instruction on the project deliverables. Opportunities to showcase the project findings, recommendations and conclusions should be pursued by the Technical Advisory Committee members. The Technical Advisory Committee will approve the acceptance of the project deliverables.

**Final Report and Summary**CA final report of work processes, findings, and recommendations will be required for each project. An executive summary will accompany each final report. The summary may be in a format proposed by the lead agency or in the uniform format of the Research, Planning, and Technology Innovation Pooled Fund Program. The elements of the final report should include: a discussion of the problem that was researched, review of current practices, in-depth review of the procedures and processes used to conduct the project, conclusions and recommendations, references, bibliography, and acknowledgments with a listing of Technical Advisory Committee members for the project. The lead agency and Technical Advisory Committee members, consistent with the project plan of work, may request additional elements.

**Final Invoice Payment**CBased on the delivery and acceptance of the products and reports included in the plan of work the final invoice will be paid to the investigator. FHWA will reimburse the lead agency for the remaining costs of the project up to the obligation limits of the project. The lead agency will complete the Certification of Completion or other documentation consistent with the lead agency's FHWA-approved Conduct of Research Manual. Copies of the Certification of Completion will be sent to all project partners. At the discretion of the lead agency, an After Action Review may be conducted with the investigator to measure the projects processes and outcomes. The project now moves to the product distribution step.

### **Product Distribution**

The lead agency will ensure that all of the project partners receive all project reports and deliverables.

**Report and Summary Distribution**CAAt the direction of the Technical Advisory Committee members, the lead agency may distribute the project report and all or some of the project deliverables beyond the project partners. This direction will be based on the nature of the project and the advisability of broader-based distribution. Issues of fiduciary fairness and responsibility will need to be considered by the Technical Advisory Committee members in this decision. The desirability of broad-based implementation will also be considered. If appropriate, study products should be sent to the relevant AASHTO Standing Committee and to the relevant TRB committee or subcommittee. Whenever possible, the full text of all reports should be made available on the web and should be linked to TRIS Online. These reports should be in an accessible format, such as html or Adobe Acrobat. (The cost of putting the full text of the report on line should be borne by the program administrator.)

### **Research Implementation**

The Transportation Research, Planning, and Technology Innovation Pooled Fund Program is primarily an applied research, planning, and technology innovation funding and contracting mechanism. Definable and measurable implementation is crucial to overall program viability. Therefore, the pooled fund program includes an implementation strategy that tracks near-term (1 year) and long-term (3 to 5 years) effects of program investments.

**Follow-up Questionnaire** CAt the conclusion of the pooled fund project, and for selected projects again at 1-year, 3-year, and 5-year intervals, the project partners will be polled on implementation potential, effect, and experiences with an evaluation of cost/labor savings or increases. The questionnaire will be completed by Technical Advisory Committee members or representatives from their agencies, institutions, foundations, or companies. Uniform quantitative and qualitative questions will be used in the questionnaires. The lead agency will be responsible for doing the surveys and sharing the results by posting them on the web.

### **Annual Summary**

**Compilation of Annual Summary**--An annual report summarizing the number of problem statements posted, the number of pooled fund projects initiated, and the number of projects completed will be compiled and published on the web site. This report will include information obtained during the previous year.

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